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ABSTRACT

TeleLearning System, Incorporated plans to offer correspondence courses by computer. Fifteen universities are participating in TeleLearning Network pilot programs; however, none of the courses are recognized for credit at this time. The courses combine the traditional correspondence course approach with the modern technology of computer-to-computer communications. Some courses will be available on floppy disks, others will be sent lesson-by-lesson to students' computers over telephone lines. Instructor-student communication will also take place over telephone lines. The courses are chosen for their entertainment value, educational content, and the ease with which they can be put on the computer. Instructors will work with technology experts to translate course material to computers and will be paid based on lessons completed. (DC)

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Private Company to Offer 170 Courses by Computer in 'Electronic University'

By JUDITH AXLER TURNER

WASHINGTON

A San Francisco company announced here last week that it would offer 170 correspondence courses by computer as part of what it calls an "electronic university." Some of the courses will begin this week.

"Within three years, the TeleLearning Network will be used to educate more people than any other private educational institution in the world," predicted Ronald F. Gordon, chairman of the company, TeleLearning System, Inc.

"We hope to sell a course to everyone who has a personal computer and everyone who buys one next year," a company spokesman said.

Ten to eleven million microcomputers are in use in the United States, and by the end of 1984 the number in use will reach 30 to 33 million, according to Future Computing, a market-research firm in Richardson, Texas.

None of the 40 to 50 initial course offerings—mostly computer-literacy courses—are recognized for credit at a college or university. Mr. Gordon said his company was negotiating with educational institutions to provide credit for TeleLearning courses.

Mr. Gordon said that 15 universities are involved in TeleLearning pilot programs.

Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell, who spoke at the press conference launching TeleLearning, said the company's approach would help solve "one of the big problems in education—that it is labor intensive."

"The thrilling thing about the concept of the Electronic University is its flexibility and its adaptability as far as its ability to reach all learners on all levels and then to teach them where they are and then to individualize the instruction for each and every student," Mr. Bell said.

Company officials at the press conference handed out statements supporting the TeleLearning concept from such higher-education leaders as Alvin C. Eurich, president of the Academy for Educational Development; Kenneth E. Young, executive director of the National University Continuing Education Assocation; and Donald R. McNeil, president of the American Open University.

TeleLearning plans to combine the approach of traditional correspondence courses with the modern technology of computer-to-computer communications. Students will work through lessons at their own pace at their own computers. They will be able to ask questions or submit papers and completed tests to their instructors over TeleLearning's computer communications network.

Courses on Floppy Disks

Computer-literacy instructors on the TeleLearning staff will be available 24 hours a day for instantaneous responses, a spokesman said. Other instructors will respond to students' questions and return completed tests and papers by computer within 24 hours.

Some courses will be sent to students on floppy disks; others will be sent lesson by lesson over telephone lines to the students' computers from TeleLearning's mainframe computer.

The company spokesman, who asked not to be quoted by name, explained that courses with a great deal of graphics are too large to fit on most disks. "One picture, while it may be worth 1,000 words, takes 8,000 bytes," he said. A byte is equal to approximately one character of a word of instruction to the computer; a typical floppy disk contains 320,000 bytes.

Messages between instructors and students will be sent through the mainframe computer, also.

Students will be required to buy TeleLearning's "knowledge package," which includes a course catalogue and a computer program that allows home computers to talk to the company's mainframe through a device called a modem. TeleLearning will sell modems to students who do not have them.

The "knowledge package" ranges in price from $129 to $229, depending on the microcomputer it is to be used with.

Courses are being developed by college professors, schoolteachers, trainers, and experts in various fields. In addition to computer-literacy courses, the subjects currently available range from human sexuality to James Joyce.

The spokesman said courses were chosen for their entertainment value, their educational content, and the ease with which they can be put on a computer.

Courses will cost between $35 and $100, based on their length and the credentials of the instructor. They will run on all microcomputers, Mr. Gordon said. The cost of communication time with the instructors is included in the course fee.

Instructors will work with TeleLearning's educational technology experts to translate course material to computers, and will be paid by the lessons completed. That policy is designed to encourage instructors to keep students happy by responding fully and promptly to their queries, concerns, and completed assignments, the spokesman said.

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